



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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circular which called us together, "we are drawn together by a common tie—our love for the children, and our desire to serve them in the very best way, by preparing ourselves for the great task of motherhood and child-training." But we cannot begin this Conference without remembering that a shadow rests upon us and upon every society which exists for reaching after the common ideal, because we meet with the sense of that great national loss which appeals especially to a society like our own. We have all grown up in the consciousness that the highest home in the land was inspired by that reaching after the ideal to which we as a society desire to devote ourselves. We feel that we are bereaved— orphaned—yet at the same time that we are meeting with an added incentive to try to attain the objects of our Union, inasmuch as our beloved Queen passed away at a time when our country was in the midst of dangers and difficulties—dangers and difficulties which can only be met by the production in the homes of this country of men and women who will be capable of facing and overcoming them. Our Queen has left us a great and precious inheritance, but none more so than the impression which has been left on the country that her influence arose more than anything else from *character*, through absolute devotion to duty, and always reaching after the ideal. We are, therefore, meeting to-day with that added incentive to be true and loyal to her great memory by striving to use this inheritance which she has left us. I will not take up your time just now, as the first business of the morning is to listen to a paper by our founder, Miss Charlotte Mason. We deeply regret that she is not able to be with us herself, but it is a great joy to her to see the seeds she has sown growing and flourishing. She sends us her greetings, and we know that she will be with us in spirit to-day.

MRS. HOWARD GLOVER then read MISS MASON'S paper on

"EDUCATION IS A LIFE."

We all know the P.N.E.U. motto,—*"Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life,"*—especially well in the neat diagrammatic form in which it appears on the covers of our Library books. I am told that we, as a society, are destined

to live by our motto. A notable educationalist writes to me, in connection with public education,—*"there is more need than ever for such a view of education as that embodied in the memorable words which are the motto of the Parents' Review."* An inspiring motto must always be a power, but to live *upon* the good repute of our motto, and to live *up* to it and *in* it are two different things, and I am afraid the Parents' Union has much and continual thinking and strenuous living to face, if it proposes to stand before the world as interpreting and illustrating these "memorable words." But we are not a faint-hearted body, we *mean* and mean intensely; and to those who purpose the best, and endeavour after the best, the best arrives.

Meantime, we sometimes err, I think, in taking a part for the whole, and a part of a part for the whole of that part. Of the three lines of our definition, that which declares that "education is an atmosphere" pleases us most, perhaps, because it is the most inviting to the *laissez-aller* principle of human nature. By the way, we lose something by substituting "environment" (that blessed word, Mesopotamia!) for atmosphere. The latter word is symbolic, it is true, but a symbol means more to us all than the name of the thing signified. We think of fresh air, pure, bracing, tonic,—of the definite act of breathing which must be fully accomplished, and we are incited to do more and mean more in the matter of our children's surroundings if we think of the whole as an atmosphere, than if we accept the more literal "environment."

But, supposing that "education is an atmosphere" brings a fresh and vigorous thought to our minds, suppose that it means to us, for our children, sunshine and green fields, pleasant rooms and good pictures, schools where learning is taken in by the gentle act of inspiration, followed by the expiration of all that which is not wanted, where charming teachers compose the children by a half-mesmeric effluence which inclines them to do as others do, be as others are,—suppose that all this is included in our notion of "education is an atmosphere," may we not sit at our ease and believe that all is well, and that the whole of education has been accomplished? No; because though we cannot live *without* air, neither can we live *upon* air, and children brought up upon

"environment" soon begin to show signs of inanition; they have little or no healthy curiosity, power of attention, or of effort; what is worse, they lose spontaneity and initiative; they expect life to drop into them like water into a rain-tub, without effort or intention on their part.

This notion, that education is included in environment, or, at the best, in atmosphere, has held the ground for a generation or two, and it seems to me that it has left its mark upon our public and our private lives. We are more ready to be done unto than to do; we do not care for the labour of ordering our own lives in this direction or in that; they must be conducted for us; a press of engagements must compel us into what next, and what next after. We crave for spectacular entertainment, whether in the way of pageants in the streets, or spectacles on the boards. Even Shakespeare has come to be so much the occasion for gorgeous spectacles that what the poet says is of little moment compared with the show a play affords. There is nothing intentionally vicious in all this; it is simply our effort to escape from the *ennui* that results from a one-sided view of education,—that education is an atmosphere *only*.

A still more consuming *ennui* set in at the end of the eighteenth century, and that also was the result of a partial view of education. "Education is a life" was the (unconscious) formula then; and a feverish chase after ideas was the outcome. It is pathetic to read how Madame de Staël and her coterie, or that "blue-stockings" coterie which met at the Hôtel Rambouillet, for example, went little to bed, because they could not sleep; and spent long nights in making character sketches of each other, enigmas, anagrams, and other futilities of the intellect, and met again (some of them) at early breakfast to compose and sing little airs, upon little themes. We may be as much inclined to yawn in each other's faces as they were, but, anyway, if we sin as they did by excess in one direction, there is less wear and tear in a succession of shows than in their restless pursuit of inviting notions. Still, the beginning of the nineteenth century has its lessons for the beginning of the twentieth. They erred, as we do, because they did not understand the science of the proportion of things. We are inclined to say, "education is environment"; they would say,

"education is ideas"; the truth includes both of these, and a third definition introducing another side, a third aspect of education.

The third conceivable view, "education is a discipline," has always had its votaries and has them still. That the discipline of the habits of the good life, both intellectual and moral, forms a good third of education, we all believe. The excess occurs when we imagine that certain qualities of character and conduct run out, a prepared product, like carded wool, from this or that educational machine, mathematics or classics, science or athletics; that is, when the notion of the development of the so-called faculties takes the place of the more physiologically true notion of the formation of intellectual habits. The difference does not seem to be great; but two streams that rise within a foot of one another may water different countries and fall into different seas, and a broad divergence in practice often arises from what appears to be a small difference in conception in matters educational. The father of Plutarch had him learn his Homer that he might get heroic ideas of life. Had the boy been put through his Homer as a classical grind, as a machine for the development of faculty, a pedant would have come out, and not a man of the world in touch with life at many points, capable of bringing men and affairs to the touchstone of a sane and generous mind. It seems to me that this notion of the discipline which should develop "faculty" has tended to produce rather one-sided men with the limitations which belong to abnormal development. An artist told me the other day that the condition of successful art is absorption in art, that the painter must think pictures, paint pictures, nothing but pictures. But when art was great, men were not mere artists. Quentin Matsys wrought in iron and painted pictures and did many things besides. Michael Angelo wrote sonnets, designed buildings, painted pictures; marble was by no means his only vehicle of expression. Leonardo wrote treatises, planned canals, played instruments of music, did a hundred things and all exquisitely. But then, the idea of the development of faculty, and the consequent discipline, had not occurred to these great men or their guardians.

Having safe-guarded ourselves from the notion that

education has only one face, we may go on to consider how "education is a life," without the risk of thinking that we are viewing more than one side of the subject.

It has been said that "man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," and the augustness of the occasion on which the words were spoken, has caused us to confine their meaning to what we call the life of the soul; when, indeed, they include a great educational principle which was better understood by the medieval church than by ourselves. May I be allowed once again to describe a painting in which the creed of the House of Education, and, I hope, that of the Parents' Union, is visibly expressed. Many of us are familiar with the frescoes on the walls of the so-called Spanish Chapel of the church of S. Maria Novella. The philosophy of the Middle Ages dealt, as we know, with theology as its subject-matter; and, while there is much ecclesiastical polity with which we have little sympathy pictured on the remaining walls, on one compartment of wall and roof we have a singularly satisfying scheme of educational thought. At the highest point of the picture we see the Holy Ghost descending in the likeness of a dove; immediately below, in the upper chamber are the disciples who first received his inspiration; below, again, is the promiscuous crowd of all nationalities who are brought indirectly under the influence of that first outpouring, and in the foreground are two or three dogs, shewing that the dumb creation was not excluded from benefiting by the new grace. In the lower compartment of the great design are angelic figures of the cardinal virtues, which we all trace more or less to divine inspiration, floating above the seated figures of apostles and prophets, of whom we know that they "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." So far, this medieval scheme of philosophy reveals no new thought to persons instructed in the elements of Christian truth. But, below the prophets and apostles, are a series of pictured niches, those to the right being occupied by the captain figures, the ideal representations of the seven Liberal Arts, figures of singular grace and beauty, representing such familiar matters as grammar, rhetoric, logic, music, astronomy, geometry and arithmetic, all of them under the outpouring of the Spirit

of God. Still more liberal is the philosophy which places at the foot of each of these figures him who seemed to be, to the artist, the leader and representative of each several science,—Priscian, Cicero, Aristotle, Tubal Cain, Zoroaster, Euclid, Pythagoras; men whom a narrower and later theology would have placed beyond the pale of the Christian religion, and therefore of the teaching of the Spirit of God. But here all are represented as under the same divine outpouring which illuminated the disciples in the upper chamber.

Our nature craves after unity. The travail of thought, which is going on to-day and has gone on as long as we have any record of men's thoughts, has been with a view to establishing some principle for the unification of life. Here we have the scheme of a magnificent unity. We are apt to think that piety is one thing, that our intellectual and artistic output are quite another matter, and that our moral virtues are pretty much matters of inheritance and environment, and have not much to do with our conscious religion. Hence, there come discords into our lives, discords especially trying to young and ardent souls who want to be good and religious, but who cannot escape from the overpowering drawings of art and intellect and mere physical enjoyment; they have been taught to consider that these things are, for the most part, alien to the religious life, and that they must choose one or the other; they do choose, and the choice does not always fall upon those things which, in our unscriptural and unphilosophical narrowness, we call the things of God. Let us bless Taddeo Gaddi and Simone Memmi for placing before our eyes a creed (copies* of which we might all hang upon our walls), which shows that our piety, our virtue, our intellectual activities, and, let us add, our physical perfections, are all fed from the same source, God Himself; are all inspired by the same Spirit, the Spirit of God. The ages which held this creed were ages of mighty production in every kind; the princely commerce of Venice was dignified and sobered by this thought of the divine inspiration of ideas,—ideas of trade, ideas of justice and fair balance and

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of utility; Columbus went out to discover a new world, informed by the divine idea, as our own philosopher, Coleridge, points out, adding that "great inventions and Ideas of Nature, presented to chosen minds by a higher power than nature herself, suddenly unfold as it were in prophetic succession systematic views destined to produce the most important revolutions in the state of man." When Columbus came back, his new world discovered, people and princes took it as from God and sang *Te Deum*.

Michael Angelo writes to his friend Vittoria Colonna, that "good Christians always make good and beautiful figures. In order to represent the adored image of our Lord, it is not enough that a master should be great and able. I maintain that he must also be a man of good morals and conduct, if possible a saint, in order that the Holy Ghost may give him inspiration." In truth, a nation or a man becomes great upon one diet only, the diet of great ideas communicated to those already prepared to receive them by a higher Power than nature herself.

We are a small society, little talked about and little known, but I think we hold amongst us the little leaven which is able to leaven the whole lump. Let us set ourselves to labour with purpose and passion to restore to the world, enriched by the additions of later knowledge, that great scheme of unity of life which produced great men and great work in the past. Nor need we fear that in endeavouring after some such doctrine of ideas as may help us in the work of education, that we are running counter to science. Many of us feel, and, I think, rightly, that the teaching of science is *the* new teaching which is being vouchsafed to mankind in our age. Some of us are triumphant and believe that the elements of moral and religious struggle are about to be eliminated from life, which shall run henceforth, whether happy or disastrous, on the easy plane of the inevitable; others are bewildered and look in vain for a middle way, a place of reconciliation for science and religion; while others of us again take refuge in repudiating "evolution" and all its works and nailing our colours to religion, interpreted on our own narrow lines. Whichever of these lines we take, we probably err through want of faith.

Let us first of all settle it with ourselves that science and

religion cannot, to the believer in God, by any possibility be antagonistic. Having assured ourselves of this, we shall probably go on to perceive that the evolution of science is in fact a process of revelation, being brought about in every case, so far as I am aware, by the process which Coleridge has so justly described, that is, "that the *Ideas* of nature, presented to chosen minds by a higher power than nature herself, suddenly unfold as it were in prophetic succession systematic views destined to produce the most important revolutions in the state of man." Huxley defines the utility of Biology "as helping to give right ideas in this world which is, after all," he goes on to say, "absolutely governed by ideas, and very often by the wildest and most hypothetical ideas." Again, he writes, "those who refuse to go beyond the fact rarely get as far as the fact; and anyone who has studied the history of science knows that almost every great step therein has been made by the 'anticipation of nature,' that is by the invention of hypotheses." One cannot help thinking that scientific men would find the unifying principle they are in search of in the fine saying of Coleridge's which I have twice quoted; so would they stand revealed to themselves as the mouthpieces, not merely of *the truth*, for which they are so ready to combat and suffer, but also as the chosen and prepared servants of Him who is the Truth.

Few of us can forget Carlyle's incomparable picture of the *Tiers Etat* waiting for organisation,— "Wise as serpents; harmless as doves: what a spectacle for France! Six hundred inorganic individuals, essential for its regeneration and salvation, sit there, on their elliptic benches, longing passionately towards life." Less picturesque, but otherwise very much on a par with this, is Coleridge's description of Botany, as that science existed in his own day, waiting for the unifying idea which should give it organisation,— "What," he says, "is Botany at this present hour? Little more than an enormous nomenclature; a huge catalogue, *bien arrangé*, yearly and monthly augmented, in various editions, each with its own scheme of technical memory and its own conveniences of reference! The innocent amusement, the healthful occupation, the ornamental accomplishment of *amateurs*; it has yet to expect the devotion

and energies of the philosopher." The keyword for the interpretation of life, both animal and vegetable, has been presented to our generation and we cannot make too much of it. We cannot overrate the enormous repose and satisfaction to the human mind contained in the idea of evolution. But it is well to remember that for three thousand years thinkers have been occupied with attempts to explain the world by means of a single principle, which should also furnish an explanation of reason and the human soul. Herakleitos and his age thought they had laid hold of the informing idea in the phrase, "the true Being is an eternal Becoming": the "universal flux of things" explained all. Demokritos and his age cried—Eureka! solved the riddle of the universe, with the saying that "nothing exists except atoms moving in vacancy." Many times since, with each epoch-making discovery, has science cried—Eureka! over the one principle which should explain all things and eliminate Personality.

But some little knowledge of history and philosophy will give us pause. We shall see that each great discovery, each luminous idea of nature that the world has received hitherto, is like a bend in a tortuous lake which appears final until your boat approaches it, and then—behold an opening into further and still further reaches beyond! The knowledge of God will give us something more than the wider outlook which comes of a knowledge of history—the knowledge that there *is*, what Wordsworth calls, the "stream of tendency," a stream of immeasurable force in shaping character and events: but there is also Personality, a power able to turn the "stream of tendency" to its uses, if also liable to be carried away in its current.

Forgive me if I appear to dwell on a subject which at first sight appears to have little to do with the bringing up of children; but I think that his attitude towards the great idea, great lesson, set for his age to grasp, is a vital part of a parent's preparation. If parents take no heed of the great thoughts which move their age, they cannot expect to retain influence over the minds of their children. If they fear and distrust the revelations of science, they introduce an element of distrust and discord into their children's lives. If, with the mere neophyte of science, they rush to the conclusion

that the last revelation is final, accounts for all that is in man, and, to say the least, makes God unnecessary and unknowable, or negligible, they may lower the level of their children's living to that struggle for existence—without aspiration, consecration and sacrifice—of which we hear so much. If, lastly, parents recognise every great idea of nature as a new page in the progressive revelation made by God to men already prepared to receive such idea; if they realise that the new idea, however comprehensive, is not final nor all-inclusive, nor to be set in opposition with that personal knowledge of God which is the greatest knowledge, why then their children will grow up in the attitude of reverence for science, reverence for God, and openness of mind, which befits us for whom life is a probation and a continual education. So much for the nutriment of ideas laid on the table of the world during this particular course of its history.

Next, we may have poetry, or art, or philosophy; we cannot tell; but two things are incumbent upon us,—to keep ourselves and our children in touch with the great thoughts by which the world has been educated in the past, and to keep ourselves and them in the right attitude towards the great ideas of the present. It is our temptation to make too personal a matter of education, to lose sight of the fact that education is a world business, that the lessons of the ages have been duly set, and that each age is concerned, not only with its own particular page, but with every preceding page. For who feels that he has mastered a book with the last page of which only he is familiar? This brings me to a point I am anxious to lay before you. We do not sufficiently realise the need for unity of principle in education. We have no Captain Idea which shall marshal for us the fighting host of educational ideas which throng the air; so, in default of a guiding principle, a leading idea, we feel ourselves at liberty to pick and choose. This man thinks he is free to make science the sum of his son's education, the other chooses the classics, a third prefers a mechanical, a fourth a commercial programme, a fifth makes bodily health his cult, and chooses a school which makes the care of health a special feature of its programme (not that we must allow health to be neglected, but that, given good general conditions, the less obvious attention their health receives the better for the

boys and girls): and everyone feels himself at liberty to do that which is right in his own eyes with regard to the education of his children.

A negative purpose of our society is to discourage in every way we can the educational faddist, that is, the person who accepts a one-sided notion in place of a universal idea as his educational guide. Our positive purpose is to present, in season and out of season, one such universal idea, that is, that education is the science of relations.

A child should be brought up to have relations of force with earth and water, should run and ride, swim and skate, lift and carry; should know texture, and work in material; should know by name, and where, and how, they live at any rate, the things of the earth about him, its birds and beasts and creeping things, its herbs and trees; should be in touch with the literature, art and thought of the past. I do not mean that he should *know* all these things; but he should feel, when he reads of it in the newspapers, the thrill which stirred the Cretan peasants when the frescoes in the palace of King Minos were disclosed to the labour of their spades. He should feel the thrill, not from mere contiguity, but because he has with the past the relationship of living pulsing thought; and, if blood be thicker than water, thought is more quickening than blood. He must have a living relationship with the present, its historic movement, its science, literature, art, social needs and aspirations. In fact, he must have a wide outlook, intimate relations all round; and force, virtue, must pass out of him, whether of hand, will, or sympathy, wherever he touches. This is no impossible programme. Indeed it can be pretty well filled in by the time an intelligent boy or girl has reached the age of thirteen or fourteen; for it depends, not upon *how much* is learned, but upon *how* things are learned.

Give children a wide range of subjects, with the end in view of establishing in each case some one or more of the relations I have indicated. Let them learn from first hand sources of information—really good books, the best going, on the subject in hand. Let them get at the books themselves, and do not let them be flooded with a warm diluent at the lips of their teacher. The teacher's business is to indicate, stimulate, direct and constrain to the acquirement

of knowledge, but by no means to be the fountain-head and source of all knowledge in his or her own person. The less parents and teachers talk-in and expound their rations of knowledge and thought to the children they are educating, the better for the children. Peptonised food for a healthy stomach does not tend to a vigorous digestion. Children must be allowed to ruminate, must be left alone with their own thoughts. They will ask for help if they want it.

You will see at a glance, with this Captain Idea of establishing relationships as a guide, the unwisdom of choosing or rejecting this or that subject, as being more or less useful or necessary in view of a child's future. We decide, for example, that Tommy, who is eight, need not waste his time over the Latin Grammar. We intend him for commercial or scientific pursuits,—what good will it be to him? But we do not know how much we are shutting out from Tommy's range of thought besides the Latin Grammar. He has to translate, for example,—"*Pueri formosos equos vident.*" He is a ruminant animal, and has been told something about that strong Roman people whose speech is now brought before him. How their boys catch hold of him! How he gloats over their horses! The Latin Grammar is not mere words to Tommy, or rather Tommy knows, as we have forgotten, that the epithet "mere" is the very last to apply to words. Of course it is only now and then that a notion catches the small boy, but when it does catch, it works wonders, and does more for his education than years of grind.

I will not detain you longer, because a few former students of the House of Education are about to put before you some examples of how we try, however imperfectly, to make education a science of relationships—in other words, how we try in one subject or another to let the children work upon living ideas. I would only add one word; our own living function, our power as a society, and with our power, our endurance, will depend, as has been well said in your Report for this year, upon how far we lay hold of and carry out the living thought which our Union is intended to embody and express. I venture to think that one proof that we are in this sense a living society, is the happy immunity of the P.N.E.U. from educational fads.